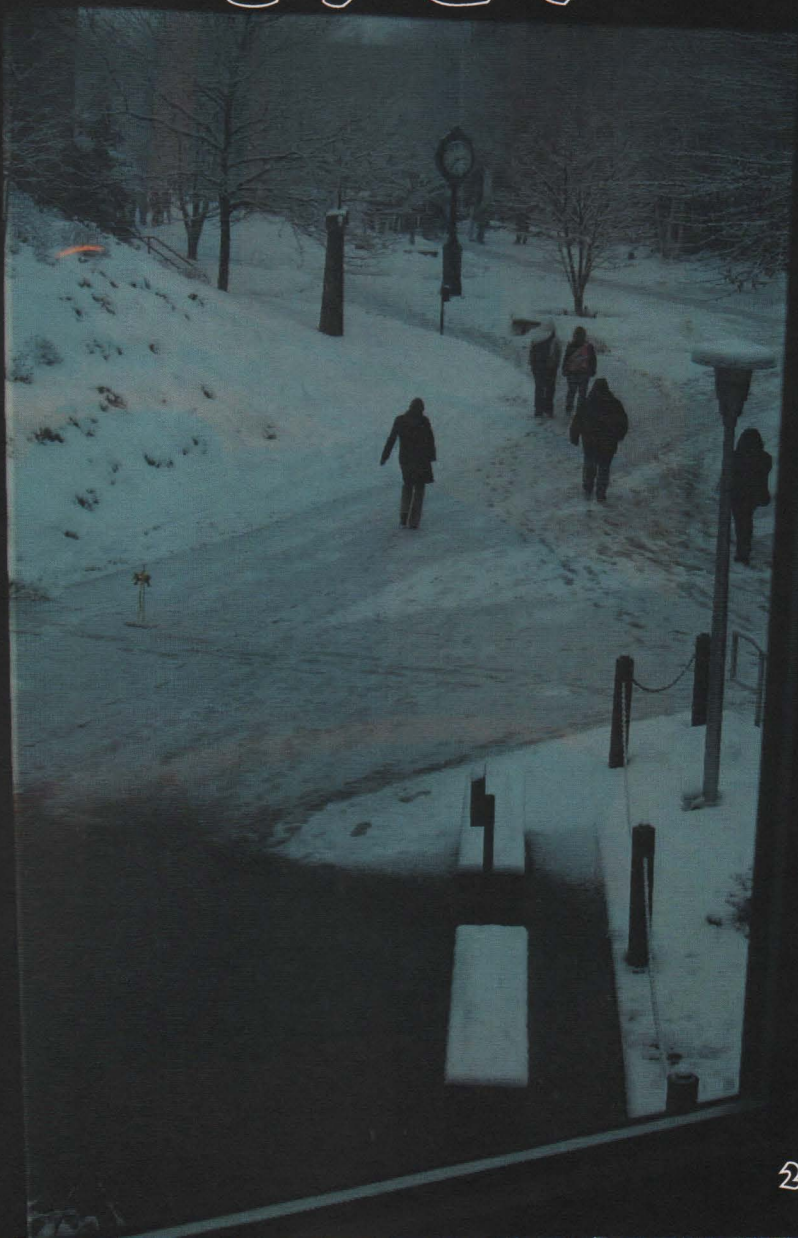


M 21 Literary Society
Presents

Edge City



2006



Edge City 2006

Editorial Board

Rebecca Brown

Katherine Kounovsky

Amanda Shumway

Bobbi Van Druff

Editorial Staff

Dr. Andrea Harris—Proofreading, Submissions

Jon Holtz—Publication

MU Literary Society Advisors

Dr. Andrea Harris, Department of English and Modern Languages

Louise Sullivan-Blum, Department of English and Modern Languages

Published annually by the Mansfield University Literary Society, *Edge City* is Mansfield University's student literary journal, featuring poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction written by Mansfield University students. All MU students are welcome to submit their creative work to *Edge City*. Submissions are accepted in the Spring semester and reviewed blindly by the editorial board. Layout and printing occur in the summer, with publication in the Fall semester. For more information about *Edge City* or the MU Literary Society, please contact Andrea Harris at X4591 or Louise Sullivan-Blum at X4597.

The publication of *Edge City* is made possible through funding from the Student Activities Fee.

[Cover Photo: Mansfield in Winter (Courtesy of MU PR)]

Table of Contents

Page

3 Contributors and Staff

Page**Title****Author**

5	It's	Jamie Sweitzer
6	Laundry night....my Thursday ritual	Rebecca Brown
7	You've Got to Start Somewhere	Katherine Kounovsky
11	Things in My Closet	Bobbi Van Druff
12	Apologies to Walt Whitman...	Rebecca Brown
13	Failure	Bobbi Van Druff
14	Surreal Edge	Bobbi Van Druff
15	A Response to "The Unwanted Child"	Bobbi Van Druff
17	Where I'm From	Corey Tarreto
18	Lost	Corey Tarreto
24	Mother's Kitchen	Bobbi Van Druff
25	The Nature of Noise vs. Sound	Melissa Clark
30	The Essence and Effect of Compassion	Corie Detwiler
31	A Portrait of Worshipped Illusions	Corie Detwiler
32	Of the Approach and Understanding of a Whitened Sepulchre	Corie Detwiler
33	Between the Lines	Nicole Thomas
36	Convicted	Thomas Dalton
37	Enough	Katherine Kounovsky
41	This Is My Love	James Post
42	Untitled	Thomas Dalton



Contributors and Staff

Jon Holtz will graduate in May 2007 with a B.A. in English and a minor in creative writing. An active writer, Jon chose to assist *Edge City* this year by putting together the publication. Jon publishes writing every day on the athletics website and in the local papers. He will pursue a career in Sports Information following graduation.

Melissa Clark graduated in May of 2006 with a Bachelor's Degree in English Education. She is presently working for BLaST Intermediate Unit #17 as a PSSA tutor at Cowanesque Valley Jr./Sr. High School. Her future goals are to work full-time as an English/Literature teacher and to write on the side. She enjoys writing creative nonfiction and would like to try her hand at writing novels.

Thomas Dalton is a "writer, musician, and person" from Mansfield, Pennsylvania. He plans to graduate from Mansfield University in December 2006 with a B.A. in English and a minor in Philosophy. In Spring 2006, he was the recipient of the Bernie Koloski Book Award and a departmental award for Short Critical Research Essay. As a writer, he especially enjoys poetry and songwriting.

Corie Detwiler is a third-semester sophomore with an undecided major and two minors in Studio Art and Theatre. She has this to say: "I have been writing since about 1999, when I still had teenage fantasies about being a partially clothed pop singer like all the ones I saw on MTV. They started out as lyrics then gradually began to lose their strict rhyme scheme, and then gradually their strict four-section form as I began to explore areas more spiritual and philosophical in nature."

Katherine Kounovsky will graduate with a BA in English this spring. She hopes to be pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Hunter College in New York City next fall. About her writing, she says, "To me, being a writer isn't just about the act of writing; it is a personality, a way of life, if you will. It is a way of viewing the world, seeing every single detail and taking note of it. It's about recognizing beauty in all things and



drawing conclusions about your life as a result of said recognition.”

James M. Post graduated in May 2006 with a BA in English.

Jamie Sweitzer is a junior English Education major. She loves writing and hopes to pursue a career in teaching. After Mansfield, she has no idea where she will end up, or what exactly she will be doing. Perhaps she will teach high school English. Perhaps she will pursue a graduate degree. But as she notes, “uncertainty is one of the few certainties in life.”

Corey Tarreto is a junior Psychology major with Women’s Studies and Creative Writing minors whose post-graduate plans are to do mission work overseas for three years before heading to grad school to become a campus minister. She has this to say about her writing: “My first love will always be poetry but since my career at Mansfield I’ve discovered a love for prose and short story writing. I greatly enjoy nature which often finds its way into my writing.”

Nicole E. Thomas is a Junior Communications major with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She writes, “This is my very first time being published and I am excited to allow the world witness my talents, one story at a time.”

Bobbi Van Druff is a working mother and BSE English major with a minor in creative writing. She plans to teach. She writes, “I look forward to encouraging high school students to write and show them the benefits of self expression. I will incorporate creative writing into all of my lessons as a teacher and hopefully writing will grasp the heart of at least one student.”



It's
- Jamie Sweitzer

It's a cup of coffee with a friend
It's a new beginning and an end
It's imagination, fornication, desperation
It just is

It's a bottle of cheap perfume
Clouding up a crowded room
It's forgetful, doubtful, beautiful
It just is

It's drumming with his fingertip
It's ice that makes the people slip
It's perspiration, inspiration, excitement
It just is

It's the sound of wind through the tree
It's the voice of you and the voice of me
It's amazing, fulfilling, motivating
It just is

It's a yawn, a sneeze, a smile
It's a buzz that lasts a while
It's grace, displace, hard to face
It just is

It's a soft tissue to your nose
It's sand inside your winter clothes
It's defiance, it's reliance
It just is

It's a still born star
It's who you are
It's miraculous, it's a first kiss
It's a moment

It's a second in time
It's a word that doesn't rhyme
It's fantastic, often drastic,
It's defying, it's dying
It's a breath
It's a moment
It's today
It's this moment
It just is



Laundry night....my Thursday ritual

- Rebecca Brown

It's Thursday again....
the only sound heard
is the stupid washing machine.
It's off balance again...
bang, bang, bang

THUD....

CRASH.....

Sometimes, just sometimes,
I wonder if it would be worth it.
Giving up my independence
to have you here with me.
Then I could just holler.....HONEY...
can you fix that please?
I just sit here listening...
bang, bang, thud, bang, bang, thud.
I smile as I grab the wrench
and walk into the laundry room.
I wedge myself between the wall and the washer.

1-2-3....push

Reaching underneath to reset its feet.
There.....that should do it.
Laughing at myself, knowing the threads are stripped.
Two loads later....bang, bang, thud.
Maybe independence isn't all it's cracked up to be.
Then I remember last time when we were together...
It wasn't that funny when at 2am,
I woke you with my screaming.
"God Damned Bastard....!!!"

Well how would you like it,
up to your hips in ice cold water...
because someone "FORGOT" to put the seat down.
Ok, it was a little funny.

Yes, some compromise may be in order on this subject.
But for now, I have my Thursday night ritual....Laundry night.....
Oh yeah....and the spin cycle...

m21

L.S

You've Got To Start Somewhere

- Katherine Kounovsky

"It's a comfort to know
When you're singing the hit-the-road blues
That anywhere else you could possibly go
After New York would be a pleasure cruise"

~Rent

RING RING RING RING! My eyes shoot open and I immediately reach for the outlet that my alarm clock is plugged into. I hate that damn clock. I begrudgingly roll out of bed and get ready for my shower as I listen to the constant traffic noise right outside my window. When I spent my first few nights in Manhattan, I found it impossible to sleep. It was even more difficult to motivate myself for the day to come when all that awaited me outside was an out-of-tune, out-of-time symphony made up of car horns. I don't see them as an annoyance anymore though. These days, they are nothing more than a sullen version of chirping birds that never sleep.

After my shower, I stand in front of the closet, wondering which fake identity I should assume today. They all have one thing in common: businesswoman. Shall I be the cutesy businesswoman in a short skirt with painted toenails and a tasteful tank top? Or should I go with the more mature white business jacket and conservative black slacks? Remembering that the temperature is supposed to get to about a hundred today, I go with the short skirt ensemble.

I fix my hair in a conservative manner and spend about twenty meticulous minutes on my make-up. I open the door and step out of my beautifully air conditioned room into the hallway. The heat hits me immediately, preparing me for the day to come. I make my way down the stairs, smiling at a few maids. I emerge from the stairwell and I see the door that leads to the street. There it is. Goal #1: Safely make your way out of the building and onto the street. I push the door open and a gust of hot city wind greets me. I immediately clench my jaw and squint my eyes a little. This is my New York face. I walk down the street and wait for the light to turn. People glare at me. I glare back at them. The look on my face claims that I am one of them; I too am a busy, impatient New Yorker who doesn't have time for anything but work. The light



changes. I cross the street with confidence and look up into the distance. The Empire State Building and I have become good friends. It greets me every morning on my way to the subway and watches me every evening as I walk home. It is important for me to form some kind of routine. I look for the things I know will always be there. I continue walking down the street and stop at a breakfast vendor. He sees me and reaches for my daily blueberry muffin. I smile and hand him a dollar as he says, "hahve uh guh daye" in his thick Brooklyn accent.

I continue my trek until I have reached the next light. Goal #2: Get to the subway without losing my mind. This is where it gets really difficult. The busy block. I look for the woman I see every morning. The short African American woman with a green smock that has "Metro" written on it. I see her and relax a little. There she is, dutifully yelling "Metro" at the top of her lungs as she hands the free newspaper to passersby. I walk quickly past multiple upscale clothing and shoe stores. People are looking at me. They all look the same to me. All of them disapproving of my presence in the city, all of them telling me that I don't belong here. I try to avoid their gazes. My feet are starting to hurt from the fashionable sandals I am wearing. My heart beats faster. I am almost there. And then it happens like it does every morning. Across the street, where the Long Island Rail Road is located, massive waves of people shoot out of the doors and cross the street to where I am walking. All of a sudden I am lost in a crowd of fast moving people. I forget where I am going for a second until I see the subway entrance a few feet away.

I pick up the pace and run down the steps. I hear the subway running and I fumble through my bag for my MetroCard. I've missed this train, but another one will come soon. I swipe my card, pass to the other side, and walk to the same spot that I occupy every day at this same time. Because the subway cars blow out hot air, it is typically ten degrees warmer down here than it is on the street. I try to casually wipe the sweat from my brow and the sides of my face, but can do nothing about the fact that my feet are sweating. I take my cell phone out to look at the time. I sigh heavily and tap my foot, pretending to be angry that the 1 train is taking so long. I don't actually mind it though. This is simply what New Yorkers do.

Looking across the platform on the other side, I notice people waiting for the uptown-bound 1 train. Everyone is standing around mak-

ing sure that his or her gaze doesn't meet anyone else's. I do the same. I whip my head to the left and look all the way down the track. Seeing the train coming, I move a little closer to the edge of the platform. The train approaches and a strong gust whips my hair every which way. As it slows to a stop, I am presented with a door right in front of me, just as planned. I quickly assess the available seating inside. Getting a seat on the subway is a competition and I see there will be no luck this morning. I grab the closest bar and brace myself as the car begins to move.

I adjust the bag I have across my shoulder and lean against the doors a little, with my hand still glued to the metal bar. The subway car screeches as it comes to a stop. I move away from the doors to let people get on. They step in and grab onto the closest bar without looking away from the newspapers they have in their hands. The subway starts moving again and I survey the car. One by one, I look at every person around me, careful not to catch their attention. An old woman with white hair reads a trashy romance novel. Next to her, an adolescent boy with headphones on has his eyes closed and is bobbing his head to the music coming from a silver iPod. Everyone I see is either reading something or listening to music. People keep to themselves on the subway. And then I see her. A timid Chinese girl around nineteen or twenty. She is looking around the car and is clearly new to these surroundings. She nervously checks the subway map on the wall and holds onto the metal bar with two hands. This girl is young and scared. Fresh meat for the city to devour. A new soul for New Yorkers to break. The subway has made at least three more stops and each time she clutches the bar as if it's preventing her death. The doors open and she meekly walks out of the car and looks around for signs to ensure that she has gotten off at the right place.

The doors close and the car jolts forward once again. Directing my attention to the advertisements on the wall, I find it very amusing that next to the Brooklyn Community College ad, there is a picture of a young couple. The man looks embarrassed and the woman is rolling her eyes. Directly above the picture, it reads, "Penile dysfunction ruining your marriage?"

The voice on the overhead speaker interrupts my thoughts by announcing that we are approaching Houston Street, my destination. I turn around so I am facing the door. People are crowding me, trying to get



to the door as well. The doors open and we're off. We all sprint to the exit. I walk up the stairs that lead to the corner of Houston and Varick. I turn left and start down the block. Every morning, I pass the same dirty old men that sit on the sidewalk and make crude comments about every woman that passes. I raise my head a little and pretend like I don't hear them saying that they can see the blue panties I have on underneath my skirt. (They are not blue.) I pass school buses that belong to the fenced-in high school across the street and keep walking until I reach the corner of Hudson and Houston.

I wait for the light to change and cross the street. I fumble around in my bag for my ID as I pass through the doors and enter the building. Goal #3: Get to my cubicle without making a fool of myself. Confidently, I walk through the large lobby, with its impressive marble floors and its stern security guards. I swipe my ID, pass onto the other side, and walk towards the elevators. There I wait with ten other people for an elevator to arrive. I try not to look at myself or the other people in the mirrored doors. Once it arrives, I step inside and push five. Everyone else pushes his or her way in until the elevator is filled to capacity.

Once I am brought to my floor, I walk to the glass doors and flash my card key in front of the lock. The green light flashes and I enter the floor. I repeat the process at the next door, just a few feet away from the last. I am now at work. I walk through the winding maze of cubicles and offices. I smile at the executives and senior editors I pass along the way. I reach my cubicle and sit down at my desk in a proper way, a way that won't make me look like I am stressed out or worried in any way. I lower my head a little to hide from the people sitting next to me. I let out a deep breath and feel myself begin to relax. For me the hard part is not working. It's getting to work in one piece. I wonder momentarily if I am the kind of person cut out for city living.

My thoughts are interrupted when the phone rings. I'm at least thirty minutes early for work, so the fact that my phone is ringing puzzles me greatly. "Hey Katherine, it's Susan. I saw you come in and thought you might want to help me out with some things that I didn't get done Friday....." And with that statement from my boss and her cheery demeanor, I am once again turned into everyone's bitch. Hey this is New York, right? And you've got to start somewhere.



Things in My Closet

- Bobbi Van Druff



A cigarette stolen from
my mother's purse, that burned a hole
in the couch when I was nine.

My father's pornography tape
that I invited the neighborhood
boys over to watch.

Quarters, hundreds of quarters
stolen from the tall beef jerky
jar in the corner of Dad's room.

My mother's vibrator that I picked up
with a kitchen towel and chased my sister
around the house with, threatening to touch her.

Jennifer, the girl down the street who used to spend the night with me
when I was thirteen and kissed me all night long.

A baby; maybe one, maybe two. I was left with an empty womb, empty
heart, and empty hopes.

A short straw, a mirror, a powder. Blood, bile, and a rope.

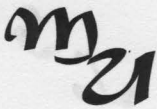
A shovel, with fresh dirt and grass clumped to the side that I found in the
back of a boyfriend's truck.

Bruises. My dignity. My self-worth.
Fear. My sanity.

A tangled pile of my hair collected from my boyfriend's hands,
My mother's hands, my own.

A pair of very small panties with Saturday
embroidered on them with little hearts,
stained with blood.

A match. Some paper. Flames.



Apologies to Walt Whitman...

- Rebecca Brown

I hear America crying.
Sobs heaving from her breast.
To the tired, poor, and hungry,
The dream is no longer fresh.

The unemployed machinists
Now stand in welfare lines.
Young teens sent to prison,
For committing adult crimes.

The shoemaker's song long silenced.
We now import from Taiwan.
The boatman sits in drydock
Because the fish are gone.

All the timber has been cut,
Not thinking we should save.
Creators of catastrophe stand denying.
There is always someone else to blame.

Uncle Sam bought all the farmland
To control the price of milk.
Our clothes now come from China,
our cotton, wool, and silk.

Our Mother is no longer singing.
Tears are falling from her face.
For even in her worst of dreams,
She never imagined so cruel a place.

A Response to "A Failed Child"

- Bobbi Van Druff

Guilt steams
up the bedroom
wearing a moist, sheer nightshirt.
Scarlet panties
tangled around one foot:
A wedding photo
face down
on the nightstand.

When I appeared in to my apartment I felt the
desperate need to gather a few belongings and flee
Justin returned home. He took the last of my things
I had of us for later. I kept thinking of the future
I was going to spend my life and a lot of it. I had
this baby or of telling him about it. He had always told me that he would
never have children and that it was my responsibility to make sure that I
didn't get "knocked up," as he would say. I knew that he would kill me.
I had to get out.

I rushed back to the bedroom and found my purple duffel bag
and began to fill it with underwear, deodorant, socks, and a couple
outfits. I found time to rummage through drawers to try to find money
stashed somewhere. Then, I heard the door open. My body was frozen,
again. Before I could even think, he turned the corner into the bedroom.
My hand was still on my duffel bag, shaking. I could tell by the look in
his eyes that he was high and for some reason, angry. "Where do you
think you are going?" he asked me with a wild look in his eyes that I had
become so familiar with. "Nowhere," I replied, feeling dumb and afraid.
It was seconds before he seized me in the corner between the dresser



Surreal Edge
- Bobbi Van Druff

I snagged my soul
on the sharp, shiny edges of the window
while trying to escape from what I know.

This knowing is intruding
on my thoughts, on my sanity, and my
will to survive on this sad, red day.

Holding a piece of glass
in my hand so tight that the edges
have cut grooves in the bones in my hand.

Between my legs I carve
a tomb around a baby who is knowingly
cursed. Death will carry us to the heavens
to cleanse the filth that covers us.

This is not killing.
I am saving this baby from cruelty
my father has created through me. He does not
deserve to be a father twice.



A Response to "The Unwanted Child"

- Bobbi Van Druff

After giving me the news, which was given in a half cheerful and half-smug voice, the doctor stared at me like a weed stares at a prairie as I sat on the edge of the exam table unable to move. I didn't want to leave the room even though it was unfamiliar and unwelcoming. A half empty tube of KY jelly and a jar of throat dispensers stared at me in the same manner as the doctor. Some time must have gone by before he stood up and announced that a nurse would come in and talk to me soon.

She walked in the office and put her soft, pink puffy fingers upon mine. The warmth of her hand brought me back to life; my body was like a cave, cold and seemingly empty with the exception of a small strange creature hanging from a stalagmite inside. She told me there were options for me, but at this point I was still paralyzed. She wrote some phone numbers on her pink pad, tore the page off, and set it on the table that held the speculum in the drawer underneath. The nurse left the room and I sat there for a long time; finally I found the courage to stand up and leave.

When I staggered in to my apartment, I began to panic. I felt the desperate need to gather a few belongings and flee before my boyfriend, Justin, returned home. He took the last of our money to get a fix for the both of us for later. I kept thinking about the money. I kept thinking that I was going to need money and a lot of it. I had no intentions on having this baby or of telling him about it. He had always told me that he would never have children and that it was my responsibility to make sure that I didn't get "knocked up," as he would say. I knew that he would kill me. I had to get out.

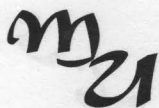
I rushed back to the bedroom and found my purple duffle bag and began to fill it with underwear, deodorant, socks, and a couple outfits. I found time to rummage through drawers to try to find money stashed somewhere. Then, I heard the door open. My body was frozen, again. Before I could even think, he turned the corner into the bedroom. My hand was still on my duffle bag, shaking. I could tell by the look in this eyes that he was high and for some reason, angry. "Where do you think you are going?" he asked me with a wild look in his eyes that I had become so familiar with. "Nowhere," I replied, feeling dumb and afraid. It was seconds before he seized me in the corner between the dresser

m
21S
L

and the wall. He had my arm pinned behind my back in a place where I could feel the clasp of my necklace. My breasts ached as he was lying on top of me. His breath was bitter, a familiar bitterness was consuming my air and I was struggling to breathe. He wasn't saying anything at this point. This was his intimidation game. He would look at me and would bite his lip and grin at the pain that was growing on my face as he tormented me.

Slowly he put his hand on my face, very softly. His thumb made its way to my eye. The incredible pressure that he was putting on my eye was excruciating; however, I had felt this before. But he wouldn't stop. He kept pushing and pushing. Then he started to ask me where I was going again. I saw darkness, but there seemed to be little tiny stars going all different directions. Every time I feared that he would make me lose an eye or hollow out my head. He had never caught me trying to leave before. I thought that this could be the time. All of a sudden I screamed out, "I am pregnant!" He stopped pushing his thumb into my eye. I knew that his head wasn't very clear, but I felt desperate. He laid on top of me for a few minutes, shaking. Then he crawled off of me, stood up and threw a pregnant little baggie on the dresser. He made his way to the bathroom and turned around and said "You need to do what is right."

I mechanically got up, grabbed my baggie, my duffle bag and left. I cried for days. Two weeks later I went back to the apartment with my duffle bag in tow and sat on the step and waited for him to come home. He finally came walking up the sidewalk with his leather jacket over his shoulder. "Is it just you?" he asked. I responded, "Yes, it is just me."



Where I'm From

- Corey Tarreto

I am from red strawberry stained fingers
and corn as sweet as the man who grew it.

I am from book mobiles, cat walks,
and cold wooden floor boards.

I am from the wood stove
that tainted my mother's lungs all those years.

I am from the knotted branch
that looks like a dragon.

I am from soft swinging hammocks
and perfect signature dinner rolls.

I am from the second to last
of six country kids
whose stories scatter my mind.

I am from the toy box
behind the couch
that spilled treasures every visit.

I am from Grandpa's parlor,
its music is inside me
and Great Grandfather's naval eyes watch over me.

I am from the run
which I would skip
and the crick
which I would dam.

I am from Christmas cookies
on the first day of deer season.

m
21

L.S

I am from fresh vegetables of every kind
and small red round potatoes.

I'm from parsnips and butter
and tea after dinner
and the best example
of home I've ever had.

Lost

- Corey Tarreto

A semi flew past on the highway in front of her, throwing a fury of leaves in every direction. The image of the I-95 rest stop flickered through its tires. With the truck gone, she could see she was quite far off in the field opposite the bathrooms and soda machines. She had stopped walking and was staring into the vastness in front of her. The wind streaked her hair to one side as she stood in still contemplation. Her body was so long and frail and she stood so stiffly, it looked as if she might fall over at any second. The late morning sun was glaring in her eyes, so she slowly closed them. Her face looked tired. Her fishnets were torn in a few places, and her short bleached hair was greasy and matted. Large bags hung just below dark eyes on her bony face.

Dozens of cars had passed now, and not one had noticed the hooker in the scenery. They were all busy trying to find their way to wherever it was they were going. The cars outside her apartment used to intrigue her in this way. She'd stare as they weaved their way through the dirty crowded streets, and imagine lives for each one. That one would be going to the hospital, that one to the day care, that one to a mistress. They all had their own little worlds inside those cars, so protected and

unaffected by others. But there was always a destination.

A crow cawed. The noise made her open her eyes. She started walking stiffly in her stilettos again. When she finally got to the side of the road she could see there were no one parked at the rest stop. She stopped on the white line. In both directions there were no cars on the horizon. Disappointed, she crossed the highway slowly. Once in the grass on the other side she spotted a bench at the farthest end of the sidewalk, past the bathrooms. The autumn sun looked welcoming on the soft, brown wood, and she walked towards it without really making the choice on her own. She landed and dug through the small bag that had been dangling from her left hand. She lit up a cigarette, closed her eyes, and let the sun's warmth penetrate. She was cold. Her skin tingled and she didn't even hear the car pull in at the other end of the parking lot. Her eyes squinted open when the door shut. A younger woman got out and went to the back to free her toddler from his car seat. He hopped onto the sidewalk as she dug for her purse and diaper bag. The wind blew hard and a waxy yellow leaf floated towards the ground. His small chubby hand reached out in joyous anticipation as the leaf landed on the toddler's giggling face.

"Oh, you've got a leaf huh?" his mother said, scooping him to her hip and retrieving the chosen leaf all in one motion. They headed towards the ladies' room door. "OK, you play with that leaf while Mommy goes to the bathroom." The mom pulled hard on the heavy metal door and her brown hair swung along with it. She could hear through the open windows as the mother walked to the end of the bathroom, entered the handicap stall, and plopped her son down on the changing table. They hadn't noticed her all the way down there on the bench. She took the last drag and flicked the butt away like she'd done since she was thirteen.

A black sedan pulled in and parked just a spot down from the mother. Simultaneously the four doors flew open and the quiet murmurs of that autumn morning were immediately drowned out.

"No! I am completely serious! This guy said he was going to kill a rabbit if people didn't give him \$10,000 in 30 days... and they did! He got the money!"

"That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. He could have just put a picture of any random rabbit on a web site with no intention of killing anything!" The four middle-aged women slowly moved

their cramped muscles as they circled the car, heading towards the bathroom door. One woman glanced her way but quickly turned back to her three friends. The door opened and the young mother navigated it with ease, despite her son's presence on her hip.

"Where do you get these stories, Lisa?" one woman said laughing.

"Oh, would you look at him!" another of the four exclaimed, which initiated an onslaught of coo-ing and high pitched compliments. The young mother smiled and slightly bounced her beaming son on her hip.

"Yes," she said smiling, "he's quite the cutie. And he certainly knows it!" All five women laughed. "Do you ladies know, by chance, where the 290 exchange is? I know it's further South, but I just don't want to get lost."

"Oh yes, it's a little tricky, you wouldn't want to miss it. All you do is continue south, like you said, and there will be a sign, I think the exit is 290 – Philmont, and then you'll take a left at the end of the exit --"

"Yes, and be sure you're in the farther right of the left-hand lanes," the second woman chimed in. "There's two, you want the one on the right 'cause you're going to have to turn right very quickly."

"There are signs for all of this, you'll be fine," assured the third.

The fourth's contribution: "You have a cell phone, right?" The young mother nodded and thanked the women. The five women exchanged a final bout of baby talk and then the mother turned to her car and began strapping her son in as the women chattered their way into the ladies' room.

She took a deep breath, flopped her leg over the other, and shut her eyes again. Tires squealed and her eyes popped open again. A sliver Lexus lurched to a stop where the mother's car had been. The door flung opened and a man's loud voice permeated the stillness she had been in.

"No. No, absolutely not!" the man yelled as he climbed from the low seat. The only way she could tell he wasn't crazy was a small ear piece in his right ear and a cord trailing into his suit pocket. She grimaced. The jump in his step got him to the bathroom door quickly and he continued his "no's" as he urinated, loudly.

"Yes, I'm saying no! Do you honestly think I would just throw that account away, especially to him! No means no, Paul!" he said as he

opened the bathroom door, just in time to whip in front of the four ladies. They were all worked up in laughter. The man rolled his eyes as he replaced himself in his driver's seat and sped off again.

"I can't take it! This kid is just too annoying! Whenever he starts talking, I just blatantly ignore him and look at the other students and continue teaching," one of the women exclaimed.

"You just blatantly ignore him?!"

"Yes, but it doesn't work! He just keeps talking over me, about his uncle or something else completely unrelated to the class! I would really love to spend one day in Admissions, just to see how in the hell some of these kids get into school!" They were all roaring now as they got back into the car. And then they were gone, and the silence fell as if they'd never been there at all.

She took a deep breath. The quiet energy of the nearby woods felt good on her ears. No cars passed for several minutes. She stood up, suddenly breaking out of a daze, and made her way into the women's bathroom. The sound of her heels echoed as she walked to the last stall. There was a yellow leaf lying on the changing table which lay open next to the toilet. She sat down on the toilet without lifting her skirt and picked up the leaf. Unable to hold herself up, she leaned her upper half on the plastic changing table. She shut her eyes and brushed the leaf back and forth across her face. Her hand moved into her coat pocket on its own and retrieved a small bottle of pills. She worked the cap off with one hand as the other continued to drag the leaf over her leathery face. The sound of the cap hitting the cold tiles stirred the silence.

A car door shut outside. Then another. She could hear their voices through the slits in the door.

"Come on dear; it'll be OK." A man's voice assured.

"We're never going to find him Daddy!" A young girl sobbed.

"Don't give up. Your signs are perfect! Someone will recognize him."

"I hope so. I don't think I could possibly ever love another dog again, Dad!" there was more crying and the sound of pieces of scotch tape being torn off. He put the sign on the door.

"There, can you read it from there?"

She read, "LOST! Thomas the dog is a three-year-old German Shepherd. He slipped out of my hands when he was chasing a squirrel.

He loves to be petted and will come if you whistle. He has a red collar with a blue tag and a silver tag. I love him a lot and miss him every second. If you see him please call (883) 965-2877! We will give you a reward!!”

“Good,” her father said.

The girl gave a big sniff, then a whimper. The father hung another sign on the men’s room’s door, and the little girl fell onto the women’s door and opened it slowly. Dragging her feet to a middle sink, she splashed her face with some water and took a deep breath. The girl must have seen the reflection of the woman’s feet in the mirror.

“Excuse me? Hello?” The girl walked to the stall door and knocked. She jumped to attention. “Have you seen a dog? A German Shepherd? His name is Thomas,” the girl said through the door.

“No, I haven’t,” she said dazed.

“Well if you happen to see him our phone number is on the door. We really want him back. We miss him a lot. We think he’s probably in the woods on the edge of town, but I wanted to put signs out here just in case.”

“How long has he been gone?” She asked sitting up.

“Two days now,” she answered with the sound of tears in her voice.

She leaned closer to the stall door which hid the girl.

“Don’t worry sweetheart. I know that if someone were out there putting up signs for me, I’d come back home as soon as I saw one.”

“He’s a dog, he can’t read.” She paused. “Why, are you lost too?”

“I guess you could say that. I don’t know where I am, that’s true.” She looked down at her hand gripping the pill bottle. Silence. “You should go back and see if there are any signs put up for you.” “Nah, there wouldn’t be.”

“How do you know?”

“Cause, people don’t really like me there.”

“Well, you’ll never know if you don’t try. That’s what my mom always says. And it’s true!”

“Holly! Are you OK in there? We need to get going dear.” Her father’s muffled voice came through the door.

“That’s my dad. I have to go. I hope you find your way home.”

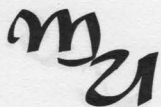
And I hope Thomas does too. Thanks for looking for him!" She turned.

"I'm coming!" the girl called.

She just sat staring at the place where the girl's feet had been. She could hear muffled conversation as they got into their car and drove away.

She stood up so suddenly the bottle of pills dropped from her weak grip. Most of them landed in the toilet behind her. With determination, she convinced her tired legs to carry her out of the bathroom and into the parking lot. Again there were no cars in sight on the highway, but this time she was pleased and crossed quickly. She began walking, towards town she supposed. There was a wide berm of grass along the road which she decided would be easier on her feet than the pavement. So would taking off her shoes. She paused, removed her shoes, smoothed her greasy hair, wiped the smudged mascara from beneath her eyes, and with an adjustment of her skirt, she was walking again. Up ahead, a small wooded area edged the grass of the berm. The beauty of it was strangely exciting. The town up ahead was probably a small, quaint village of kind country folk. She'd forgotten how great the feeling of walking barefoot on grass was. The birds chirped. She smiled.

She stopped. There, just on the edge of the woods was a large lump lying in the grass. She walked towards it. It's just a bag of garbage, she hoped. When she was within a few feet she knew she was wrong. There in the grass lay a dead German Shepherd that had obviously been thrown to the side of the road by a speeding vehicle. She froze. Her eyes glazed over and she slowly sat down in the grass. The tears she didn't think were left flowed. None of the cars that passed noticed either creature. She laid there motionless as night fell. Hundreds of little worlds passed that place, too busy to notice, too focused on their destinations. No one saw the "Lost" signs. They were all too focused on not being lost themselves.



Mother's Kitchen

- Bobbi Van Druff

Warm peanut butter cookies
and cherry pie.

Mashed potatoes and gravy,
slow roasted chicken and
peas on the side.

Burnt flesh, singed hair
from a tiny arm stuck to the
burner on the stove.

A mixer mixing, a blender blending,
wire whisks scraping the side of a pale
green bowl with a chipped rim.

Raised welts on the back, on the legs
and a cheek;
in the shape of the head of
a wooden spoon.

Steaming water with flat bubbles
capturing dirty dishes and utensils, orange
beads of grease floating on the top.

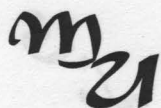
A handful of hair, a leash leading tears
to the sink for a dip.

Three spoons on the bottom.

Three spoons on the bottom.

The dog runs into the kitchen
screaming for mother to stop.

A yelp, a cry, the oven buzzer goes off.



The Nature of Noise vs. Sound

- Melissa Clark

“When much in the Woods as a little Girl, I was told that the Snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or Goblins kidnap me, but I went along and met no one but Angels.”

Emily Dickinson to T.W. Higginson, 1862

I. In the Water

As I lay in the warmth of my bath water, nothing showing but my face, I listen to my breathing. Surrounded by the ambiance of lighted candles, this is the room in my house where I find my refuge. This bathroom, in the second story of my family's home, is mine. Now a second bathroom, it had not existed when my husband and I bought the house. While he put in the plumbing and fixtures, I created the atmosphere it now contains. The walls are lavender and cream, the tub, toilet and sink are white, the fixtures chrome. The old claw foot tub that is the center of the room had traveled with me from the last house where we lived. It had not been installed in that house; I had purchased it from an elderly man, who had removed it from his own home during renovations, and I had planned to install it in a house that I owned some day. It finally found its permanent home when we purchased the house we currently live in and has become a central part of the room where I go to soak away the stresses of my life. As I listen to my breathing, I think about the fact that you normally cannot hear your breathing like you can when you are under water. It reminds me of a diver breathing air from a tank and apparatus. The air leaves and enters my lungs like the sound of wind in the trees. If I hold my breath, I can also hear my heart beat. This, too, is not heard unless all else is quiet. The blood rushes in and out, as my heart pulses in its natural rhythm. I begin to think about sound and what it does to my body and my mind. There are times when the noises around me add to my anxiety and tenseness. Then, at other times, the sounds that I hear are soothing to my soul. I don't like noise or the way it makes me feel; I like the serenity I feel through the sights and sounds of nature.

II. In the Morning

It's 6:00 a.m. The alarm rings; I hit the snooze button. Nine minutes later, there it is again. Time to get up. Shower. Coffee. Sometimes

coffee, then shower. I get the boys up and hear the shower running, the boys arguing over the toothpaste. Why can't they be in the same room for more than two minutes without picking a fight? At thirteen and nine, Ryan and Jared seem hell bent on fighting about anything and everything. The dog needs fed, the bird too. We don't have time for arguing. Are your school books all in your backpack? Make sure you get everything you need. Did I sign your planner? Bring it to me, please. My hair is still wet. I should have gotten up earlier. Sitting in the car, still waiting for Jared. He has one speed; it's always the opposite of what you want at any given time. Ryan's going to be late if we don't leave soon. When Jared gets in the car, Ryan can't wait to complain that he will be late because of Jared. Of course, Jared fires something back, verbally or physically. The fighting begins again. Did I argue with my siblings this much? With four kids instead of two, it's a wonder my mom still has her sanity.

III. In the Saddle

Brushing the brown and white spotted body of Apollo, my appaloosa, I take in his smell. I love the smell of horses. Having my own is a dream come true for me. His neck is muscular and supple, his soft brown eyes attentive. I lay my head against his neck and feel the warmth and strength of it. I continue brushing the dust from his back; he's been rolling again. Slowly, I work the few sticktights from his mane and tail. Next, I must clean the dirt and any stones from the frogs of his hooves. Will he pick up his feet for me? Yes. He's been trained well. Blanket, then saddle. He doesn't like the cinch too tight. He dances to show his disapproval. I allow him this time, and then as he settles, I snug the cinch a little more. I lead him out into the yard with a lunge line. We choose our spot, and I lunge him for a few moments. This relaxes him; I don't know why, but it does. He is a bit of a nervous horse; his natural reaction to fear is to run from it. He has only done this once while I was riding. We have been working on facing those fears, and he is dependent on my confidence to guide him. I watch as his body glides around me in a circle. He is such a beautiful creature, not so tall that I need a step stool to mount, but not short either. His height and muscular build make him the perfect barrel racer. He is quick on his feet and corners well. Someday, either Jared or I will be putting Apollo to the test, whichever of us has the most courage to barrel race him. Most likely, it will be Jared. Slowly, he

relaxes more and more. Now, it's time for the bridle.

IV. In Town

Horns beeping, car engines roaring. There is always the noise of traffic downtown, as I sit on my porch. People on the move. Where are they all going? Someone is yelling a few blocks away. I can't tell what they are saying. A dog barks down the street. Inside the house, the television is on, or the radio, often both. People talking, people singing, people yelling. Car engines running, horns honking, brakes squealing to a stop. Once in a while, you can even hear someone practicing at the Rod and Gun Club, their rifle booming in the distance. This noise is constant, it never stops. It goes on day and night. If the Grinch was sitting on my porch, I can imagine him asking, "What is all the noise, noise, noise!?"

V. In the Woods

Have you ever sat in the woods by yourself? Have you ever stopped to listen to nature? If you are a hunter, you know what I am talking about. You make your way to a spot where you can see well in all directions and sit quietly, waiting for that trophy buck to come along. At first, you hear very little, unless the wind is blowing in the trees. There seems to be no sound, no movement. Then, after you sit quietly for a little while, the woods seem to come alive. The birds begin to sing, and you begin to see them flitting around the trees. Next, you hear the small woodpeckers making their "tap, tap, tap" sound, as they look inside the bark of a tree for their next meal. If you wait long enough and quietly enough, a gray squirrel will come near on his way to the hickory nut tree just beyond you. He is busy gathering and storing nuts for the winter soon to come. If you move or make noise, he will begin to chatter his warning and all will go quiet once again. To encounter this phenomenon a second time, you will have to sit quietly and wait for the woods to reawaken.

VI. In the Car

Driving in the car, the boys are in the back seat. It doesn't matter where we are going, somewhere on the run again. Perhaps, we are going grocery shopping or to get those cleats for soccer that seem to be so desperately needed. Maybe it's the weekend, maybe a weeknight because

the thing that we are going to get is needed by tomorrow. There is always something to get, somewhere to be, something going on. The boys are confined to the car, which means they are fighting over or about something. They are too confined, too cramped to get away from each other's aggravations. They fight over anything and everything. As I attempt to drive, with all of this confusion in the backseat, I get tenser by the minute. Ryan wants the radio on, Jared off. "It's not fair!" No, it's not. How can I make each one happy and, in turn, give myself some inner peace? The tension in my mind builds; I threaten to make them walk home if they don't stop. Why must it come to this point? Is it the confinement? The closeness? Sometimes, I have to resort to pulling the car over. That seems to work; they are quiet the rest of the way. However, the next time we get in the car, the sparring will begin again.

VII. In the Sun

It is the most beautiful day of summer. The sun is warm and kisses my skin, skin that is bronzed from the bathing of this same orb. I feel the breeze on my face, as my eyes look into deep pools of inviting warmth. Those same pools pull me toward them and caress me. The boughs of the trees wrap themselves around me to draw me closer yet, their leaves like hands that call me to come nearer. Running through the forest to find the perfect spot, I bask in the excitement of the day. I lie on a blanket and stare at the ceiling the tops of the trees create. The sun peers through; the tree limbs filter the rays, creating angled splashes of light. I am not alone. I share an intimacy with the woods today, and I make a point of telling myself that I will remember it forever. The memory blazes like molten metal, branding itself within the stores of my very soul. I cannot go away untouched this day. I will not go away untouched.

VIII. In the University

Time is of the essence and in short supply. Today, I must have my research paper finished, tomorrow my blank book. Thursday, another paper is due, all this while I try to fit in essay readings and journal assignments. The dishes need done and the vacuuming can't wait another day because the dog hair is everywhere. What will I fix for supper tonight? I can't think about that now, I am trying to finish my paper. The laundry is piling up; soon, I will be forced to address that issue. What was I think-



ing when I took on school, along with a husband and kids? How will I make it all work? I must get back to my paper. There is simply too much I have left to do on it. Unfortunately, my head won't let me forget. There are too many voices reminding me of all that I need to accomplish before the week ends. When will these voices leave me alone and allow me to concentrate?

IX. In the Process

My family is in the process of subdividing our parents' property in the country. Next year, my husband and I will sell our house in town and make plans to build a new house on forty-four acres of the land where I grew up. I have recently moved my horses to that area and have been spending a lot of time there. I had forgotten what serenity could be found in the country, not realizing how much I have missed it these fifteen years past. Just the other day, Jared and I took a walk on the property. Ryan had chosen not to come with us, choosing instead, to go back and visit with his grandparents. As Jared and I made our way through the woods, we flushed out some deer that were hiding there. We watched them dart toward the sunlit edge of the trees, where they eventually disappeared from our sight. Coming into a clearing, we discovered an apple tree. Relishing in thoughts of cinnamon and sugar scented goodies, I hoisted Jared to my shoulders to pick apples from the tree, the best apples, of course, being out of our reach. This was no small feat, since Jared is nine years old, and I am in no physical shape to be trekking around with him on my shoulders, another of my woes in a stress-filled existence. Walking back to the house with a shirt full of apples, we took a different route through the woods and made plans of where we would be able to take horse rides at a later date. Years of traveling through the woods with a tractor, gathering wood for our fire, created natural paths that will be easy to follow on horseback. Thoughts and plans of future horseback rides brought welcomed opportunities for thoughts of future tranquility. Later that day, when the boys and I returned home, we made apple crisp with our bounty. Oh, how I long for days of peace and tranquility, a peace and tranquility I hope to renew with our move to the country.



The Essence and Effect of Compassion

- Corie Detwiler

Waking up in a limbo
Confused, but not broken
Whispers surround your head,
Alive, yet not breathing...

The Choice, as with everything all
To stay in blessed numbness
Or return to the fall?
...Can you feel it, growing inside...

An illusion, a rose; coveted by all
Slipping, swirling- it disappears with time
But with all the warmth all around you,
Why would you ever want to leave?

This tangled web...of layers, layers
Layers of lies, full of killers-
Prisoners of their own design.

You reach out your hand
In conjunction with the Heart that Lives,
Three chances, three tries...
Three opportunities to murder themselves further inside
Torture...torture without pain-
It is pity...pity unrestrained.

m21

LS

A Portrait of Worshipped Illusions

- Corie Detwiler

Solemnity...a lie.

Folded arms across a chest,

as austere as a cold flame

Hiding a Heart chosen to ignore

-feigning Humility.

Assyrian subterfuge;

Yet, knowing its' extension lies long before

-The seeds of deceit have been well-sown,

in their freakish obsession with perversion.

Parallels; selfishness- must it be never-ending?

As ironic as the red candles burning 'round them,

-It is the blood they spill to get closer to the Father they spurned.

Waiting...always waiting;

Watching just beyond the boundaries of physical reality

-“This” is their reduction;

A self-imposed lesson in humility.

But,...with their blood in my veins

And,...resembling one of their exalted

-I find myself; unable

To examine my emotions under scrutinous light.

m21

LS

Of the Approach and Understanding of a Whitened Sepulchre

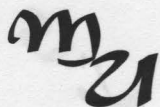
-Corie Detwiler

...To feel it; to feel it inside
Bubbling, churning like a Satanic fire
Emptiness overtaking; Emotions withdrawn
The ghastly portrait of a Sepulchre--
Splayed on the wall.

Distinctions overpassed; idly dreaming
Hearts and souls full of icy anger seething
To see the world through a faraway window;
is to pull a soul through the eyes of that distant Sleeper.

Tears rolling, dripping; torture devoid of pain
Physicality without pleasure; without name
Anxiety rising from the fathomless below-
To crack the crystals without the growth.

Hands spewing blood, dripping in perversity
Supplicating above to the scorned; it spits, it seethes
Chakras cold as ice; shut down and withdrawn
They have become, like so many of us,
...Prisoners of their own design.



Between The Lines

- Nicole Thomas

Here lounge people who make the world of suits and ties, briefcases, and important meetings, oh what bustle. Inside, a place much needed between work and sanity but beyond that rusted door lays life. The warm, sweet aromas fill the air, all five senses cannot ignore stay all day to clear your mind or take a minute to simply unwind. A house of hot coffee, warm muffins, and free refills for the artists at heart, here are the creative, the relaxed, and those in need of a break. The light tapping of a lap top keyboard trickles through the air, mixed among the soft whispers of children playing in the corner, and the rustle of the newspaper interrupt her thoughts. She pushes the small round table away from her as she lowers her body into the stiff chair, with one leg slightly crossed under the other. Her star-decorated notebook lay angled on her lap open to the first available blank page.

Staring at an empty time in space, she struggles to escape the world. She contemplates leaving a society that will function regardless of her presence. The aroma of warm vanilla lingers into her nostrils, as she can taste the cup of coffee that she didn't have this morning. She runs her fingers over the soft pink fabric as the stain dries on her skirt that she had found on clearance the day before, the perfect escape from the stiff three-piece suits she has become accustomed to. Behind transparent walls, she blocks every gentle smile or welcoming conversation and remains here hiding from strangers that only want to be nosey. She had forgotten about the special event she had promised her boss she would attend. Where was she going to find a black evening gown, a date, who cares about a date, and something to do with her hair, what was she going to do with her hair? She didn't even want to think about tomorrow and headaches to be had, a new story to cover and not to mention the submission of her work in progress column.

Staring over her maroon reading glasses, she continues to focus on a spot in space; her eyes cross for a moment as she tries to find the right words. She slips into an unconscious daydream, but as soon as she starts to wander off into a world just hers. She becomes aware, blinking her eyes fast while tears sneak down her pale skin, she smoothes down her eyebrows, collecting herself as she writes slowly at first as an idea sneaks into her head then her pen flies. She stays in her unconscious

state, when the pressure in the air changes. She can sense that someone has sat across from her but she remains completely immersed in her writing, letting her creative side take over, giving her a place to be.

Her writing isn't the writing that would be featured in a magazine and it definitely won't make her famous someday. It was the writing that she didn't have to share or have it made into something she didn't want it to be by the editor, it was hers and no one else's. Wrapped up in her own thoughts, a slight smile creeps onto her face as her sunlit brown eyes glow with an idea and she writes as quickly as she can, before she forgets. She writes not ever wanting to stop but periodically she does.

Trying to sit up straight, his tired body glides down the fabric-covered bench. He drapes his entire body over the small bench. Loosening his tie and unbuttoning his collar, he takes out a leather bound notebook. He glances up and catches her staring blankly at the clock on the wall. He slowly turns his attention to the clock, which seems to be the most interesting thing to her. Her eyes become narrow with the wrinkling of her brow while her hands become noticeably tense. She interrupts herself to take a deep breath. He quickly opens his notebook, not wanting to catch her eyes. He places it on his lap; the table sits too far away. He moves the bench closer but it squeaks in the hush environment. Now comfortable he flips the notebook open, placing it on the table.

Sprawled out he begins to wonder about her and what she actually writes and the thoughts that occupy her mind at this very moment. Nothing ever seemed to relax him like it once did; his days have become more stressful with each day that passes. She has radiance about her and it catches his eyes, he can't help but notice her for a moment. The nagging feeling that all his hard work will never get him the office he dreams of, the car he wishes he had, or the power to tell people what he really thinks. He wonders if anyone would realize if he were to do something completely out of his character. He leaves the thoughts of work, stealing another glance at her. Maybe he recognized her from a place she had never been or was it her voice? She wasn't talking so he couldn't have. He is intrigued by the fact that she scribbles; he arches his neck to get a better look. She writes like someone is timing her, a smile comes to his face as he wonders.

She fills the empty spaces between the lines, making the pages black with her unreadable handwriting. She slowly lifts her head as her

eyes wonder in the direction of him. She catches him briefly, noticing his suit and briefcase. She watches him struggle, maybe writing is a new craft for him. He taps his pen lightly, maybe thinking of an idea to write. She closes her notebook, leaning forward slightly arching her neck in order to get a better look. She notices that he writes very cautiously, his brow wrinkles with every word and he taps his pen lightly on the leather that binds his notebook. She pauses and looks at her own notebook, covered in stars and random dates and times, nothing seemed orderly to her. She moves her eyes over in his direction, staring at him as he writes. He writes as if every single word is carefully thought out and planned before it hits the page. She wonders about his day and his very careful handwriting, nothing compared to her scribbling, he must be a neat freak. She laughs at the idea-- it must have been out loud. He is startled by her sudden outburst and shyly smiles at her but he is only smiling at her head. She quickly opens her notebook and frantically begins to write scribbling whatever came to mind so she didn't have to see him looking at her, which she knew he was.

m
21

L
S

Convicted
-Thomas Dalton

Convicted. A man pre-death, but post-life,
He sat on death row. "Killed his wife,"
Said more than just twelve. "Hell awaits
For killers and liars, nothing but strife."

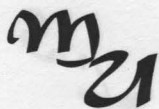
Restrained, unable to move, strapped to a table
He spoke, broken, for gone this far
One is hardly able to speak to anyone but himself.

"You are all wrong.
God knows."

Syrup entered his veins.
Darkness and flame.
At once: void and burn; nothing and pain.

"Have they fooled even you?" he cried.
No, not fooled
"I was clean of any love's blood."
It is true. Of the crime you are clean.

"And still I burn?"
And still, you burn.
It's true. God knows, agreed.



Enough

- Katherine Kounovsky

When I was sixteen years old, I lived alone with my mother. My father had not been a part of my life for some time. My older brother had moved in with his fiancée and my older sister moved away with friends. It was a beautiful spring day and I was riding in a car with an older friend of mine. We made small talk, commented on the weather, our musical tastes, and my grades. Anything that kept our minds off of the fact that we were currently driving forty-five minutes to Erie, Pennsylvania, where my mother had been committed to Saint Vincent's Psychiatric Ward.

I don't remember what I was wearing or what the car looked like. I don't remember what song was playing when my friend turned the radio up louder and began to sing along. I only remember that forty-five minutes seeming like the shortest and longest time of my life all at the same time. Everything zoomed by us as we drove. Trees, cars, buildings. But at the same time, everything was in slow motion. I remember the weather being warm and sunny in the most dismal way possible. It was as if the sun was taunting me, telling me that warmth and happiness was something that I would always see, but would never have.

The hospital was nothing extraordinary. I had visited my mom many times in many hospitals. The parking lot always seemed packed no matter what time of day it was. There were always the sliding doors that you walk through, the waiting room a short way from the entrance, the front desk with a receptionist hard at work. They were always women, usually short and plump. Receptionists are always too busy to be anything but bitchy. I stopped and asked this receptionist what floor the psych ward was on. She told me and jerked her head in the direction of the elevator without looking up from her paperwork.

My mother always used to make my sister and me do chores on Saturdays. She would sit down with a pad of paper, divide it into two columns, and write MB (Marybeth) and KC (Katherine Christine) at the top. She always said that she divided the chores equally, but being the bratty thirteen-year-old that I was,

m21

LS

I insisted that she favored my older sister. She told us that we had to get our chores done on that day. Recognizing the leeway in that commandment, I typically waited until 8 PM to lug the human-sized vacuum cleaner around the house and sweep up all the hair from our angora cat.

Hospitals always have that plain design on the walls. Medium blue with a solitary white stripe near the middle or white with pictures of flowers and plants reaching up towards the ceiling as if they are trying to escape through the vent shaft. Hospital décor tries to remain as neutral as possible. And there's always that smell, the smell that covers up the scent of blood, shit, piss, and death in general. It's so clean it's dirty. It pervades your nose and clenches its fist around your throat. I revert back to breathing through my mouth, a trick my mother taught me when my father forced me to eat the lonely green beans on my otherwise empty dinner plate.

The elevator doors opened and I was presented with a solitary white door and a little red button next to it. I pushed it and a low buzz reverberated through the hall. On the ceiling, near the door, there was a little camera.

Something clicked loudly and I knew that was my cue to open the door. On the other side, I walked down the hallway until I saw a desk, encased in Plexiglas. I told them my mother's name and that I was there to see her. They handed me a clipboard and instructed me to sign in. I scribbled my name illegibly and then asked them where her room was. They told me that visitors weren't permitted in the room, but that I would find her in the recreational room down the hall and around a few corners.

In the spring and the summer, my mom loved to make home-made iced tea. She had this large pitcher made of glass that had a little spout at the bottom of it. It was covered with sunflowers. My mom loved sunflowers. She would fill it up with hot water and put what seemed like a million tea bags in it and then would place the pitcher on the back porch. It stayed there all day until the sun went down. After



that, mom would take it back inside, add sugar, and put it in the refrigerator. I always thought it was too bitter, even with all the sugar she added.

I walked into the rec. room and was slightly confused. This was not typical. Usually hospital rec. rooms are carpeted and have piles of board games off to the side. There's always a refrigerator and houseplants to make the room feel more homely. This room was nothing more than a small gymnasium with tables and chairs. All the way in the back on the right, there was another desk, and beyond that, a locked glass door that lead to the patient's rooms. I saw my mother sitting at a table, staring into space. I called out to her as I walked closer, but she didn't answer. After sitting down next to her, I called her again and shook one of her shoulders slightly. She didn't even acknowledge that I was there. I walked over to the nurse's desk and asked them what was wrong with her. Was she on some new medication? They told me that she had shock treatment and was still recovering. I don't know what shock treatment is, I tell them, but it doesn't sound terribly helpful. They explained that it's supposed to help a person deal with depression.

I have an ongoing joke with my older siblings about the special fruit salad our mom used to make every Thanksgiving. "That stuff is the eighth wonder of the world," my brother says jokingly. In this mystical Thanksgiving Day treat are sliced apples and bananas, grapes, walnuts, and multi-colored marshmallows. Now this probably doesn't sound all that bad. It's when she adds the can of pineapple juice that it gets ugly. Imagine brown goopy bananas and apples, slimy pink, yellow, and white marshmallows. The grapes and walnuts typically hang out at the bottom of the bowl, trying to hide the fact that they are a part of such an atrocious desert.

I walked back over to my mom and shook her shoulders harder this time. She looked at me for the first time and asked who I was. I looked at her incredulously. This was never how it is. Usually she greets me with a hug and several kisses. She apologizes and cries a little. I

always tell her that she's only human and that things will get better. I told her that I'm her daughter. She laughed and said that I couldn't fool her. She said she knows I'm Linda, her older sister. Unsure what to do, I told her that she was right. Unexpectedly, she laid her head on my lap and started to sob. She hugged my legs tight and said that the devil came to her last night and fed her bolts of lightning. I feel a sick sort of amazement. I put my hand on her head and told her that everything is over now and she's safe.

I am not sure about the relationship my brother and sister had with my mom, but in the morning, when the sunlight was peeking through her bright green curtains, it was our time. When I was fourteen, I used to come in her room in the morning and sit on the corner of her bed. She would wake up, scoot over a little, and then raise her blankets, a sign for me to hop into bed with her. She would pull the sheet over our heads and we would laugh a little. She always remarked how much my hands were like hers, and how we both had piano fingers. My mom had this song that she made up when I was a baby. "Katherine, Katherine Christine, mommy's little jelly bean. Katherine, Katherine Christine, precious baby girl to me." She would sing that and then kiss my cheek. "I love you, KC Doodle," she would say. This was my time with my mom. A time when I had her all to myself, a time when my siblings couldn't touch her and neither could illness.

Eventually, all of this went away. I had to struggle to look past the illness and all of the times she hurt me to remember these things. My mother is not physically dead now, but because of her illness, she has lost a lot of what she once had. She no longer makes homemade iced tea. She rarely ever cooks and the mornings in her bed that I was so fond of are gone now. I am now twenty-one years old and have a hole in my heart where the love for my mother should be. I suspect I will struggle with my mother's illness and the effect it has had on me for the rest of my life. I don't pretend that her illness hasn't affected my life, but at the very least, I can say that things weren't always as bad as they are now. And that's enough.



This is My Love

- James Post

This is my love
I said to you as I handed you an object
slightly smaller than a breadbox
strange, uneven perhaps
delicate and filigreed here
hard and dark there, like iron
and you looked about in embarrassment
for you had no place for it
no nook or tabletop
and it seemed slightly gaudy
on the shelf there next to your own
bright like fireflies

So you took it, cradled it like a newborn
(which it might have been)
and kept it with you
as you had no place for it
but you feared to put it down
afraid you might break or lose it
or forget what I had given you
And when I returned
you tried to give it back to me
but it was dry and withered
despite your tender care

I would not
take it back

This is my love
I said
And walked away

m
21

L's

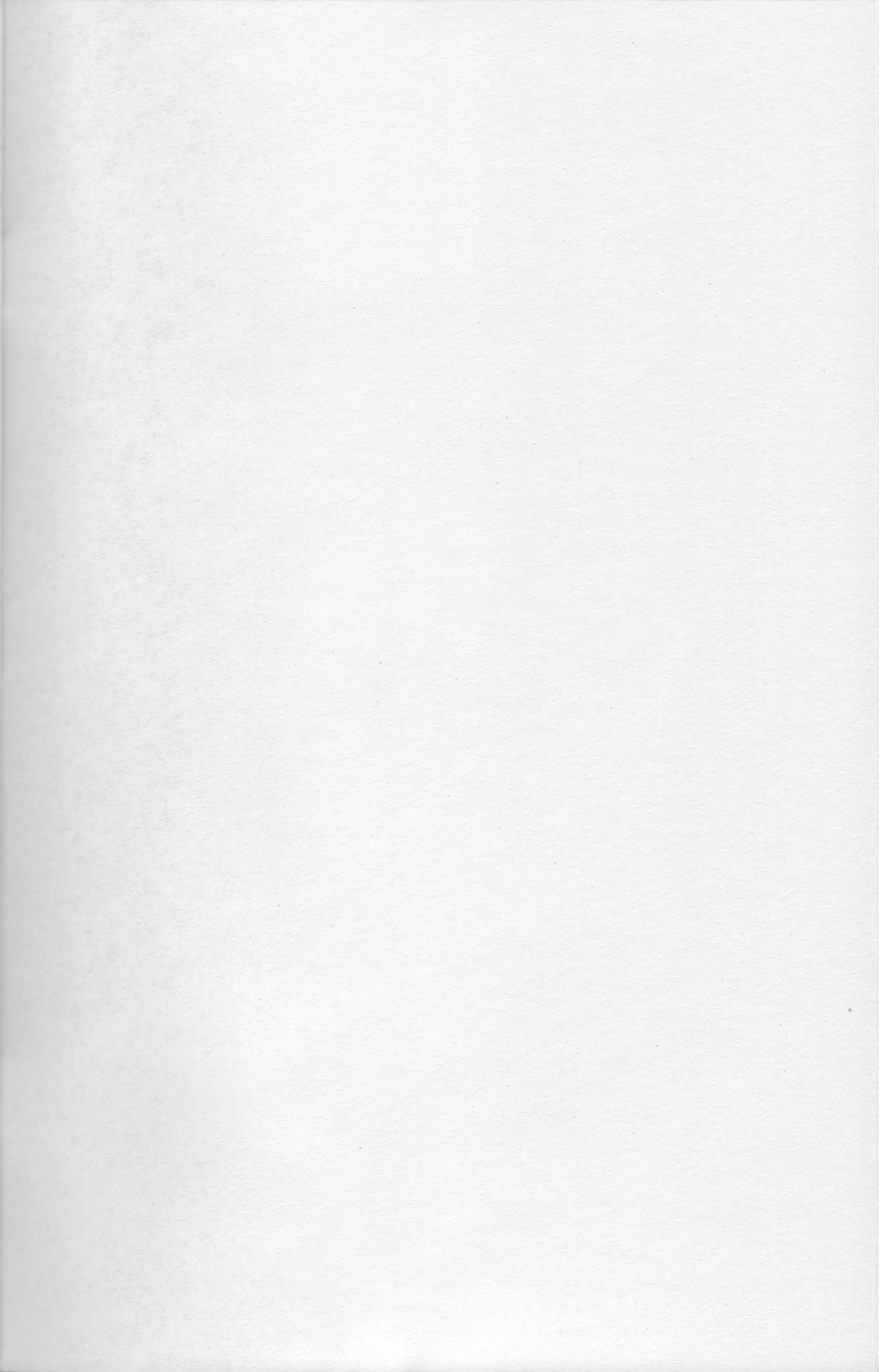
[Untitled]

- Thomas Dalton

Dear Modern World,
I love this life.
We sit by the fire of halogen lights.
Embers and ashes in glasses
Keep us in sight
Of Styrofoam masses
With fire we'll light, recycle,
And build our castles.

I am not sure about the relationship my brother and I had with my mom, but in the morning, when the sunlight came through her bright green curtains, it was our time. When she used to come in her room in the morning and sit on the corner of the bed. She would wake up, scoot over a little, and then raise her blanket a little for me to hop into bed with her. She would pull the blanket over her head and we would laugh a little. She always remained calm and her words were like hers, and how we both had phony fingers. She would sing that she made up when I was a baby "Katherine, Katherine, you're my mommy's little jelly bean. Katherine, Katherine, you're my baby girl in me." She would sing that and then she would say "you're KC Double," she would say. This was my time when I was a little girl. A time when I had her all to myself, a time when my mom would touch her and neither could illness.

Eventually, all of this went away. I lost my mother to the illness and all of the times she hurt me to remember. My mother is now physically dead now, but because of her illness, she has lost a lot of what she was like. She no longer makes homemade ice cream. She rarely ever cooks and the roomings in her bed that I was in are gone now. I am now twenty-one years old and have a hole in my heart where the love for my mother should be. I suspect I will live with my mother's illness and the effect it has had on me for the rest of my life. I don't pretend that her illness hasn't affected my life, but at the very least, I can say that things weren't always as bad as they are now. And that's enough.



(Untitled)
Thomas Dalton

Dear Modern World,
I love this life.
We sit by the fire of halogen lights,
Embers and ashes in glasses
Keep us in sight
Of Styrofoam masses
With fire we'll light, recycle,
And build our castles

